

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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SUBJ: BANZER PRECLUDES RETURN TO FORMAL DEMOCRACY IN BOLIVIA

1. SUMMARY: SPEAKING AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE EXTENSIVELY EXPANDED FACILITIES OF THE TIN SMELTER AT VINTO ON JUNE 8, PRESIDENT BANZER SURPRISED HIS AUDIENCE BY ANNOUNCING THAT HIS GOVERNMENT IS CREATING A NEW INSTITUTIONAL ORDER IN BOLIVIA WHICH WOULD NOT PERMIT THE RETURN TO A "A FALSE DEMOCRACY" PERPETUATING SOCIAL INJUSTICE. THE PRESIDENT'S WORDS WERE REINFORCED BY THE SIMULTANEOUS REITERATION BY THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR THAT THE DECREES OF NOVEMBER 1974 SUSPENDING POLITICAL AND LABOR UNION ACTIVITIES REMAIN IN FULL FORCE. BANZER'S STATEMENT APPEARS TO BE AN ANSWER TO THE TWO MAJOR BOLIVIAN POLITICAL PARTIES. THE NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT (NMR) AND THE BOLIVIAN SOCIALIST FALANGE (FSB) HAVE RECENTLY STEPPED UP THEIR DEMANDS FOR RESUMPTION OF POLITICAL AND UNION ACTIVITIES, CONSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE COUNTRY AND GENERAL ELECTIONS. WHILE PRESS AND MEDIA COMMENT HAS BEEN LIMITED AND LOW KEY, POLITICAL ACTIVISTS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND THE INTERESTED PUBLIC IN GENERAL WERE CAUGHT UNAWARE BY THE PRESIDENT'S STRONG CONDEMNATION OF FORMAL DEMOCRACY. THEY ARE WONDERING WHAT IT FOREBODES FOR BOLIVIA'S FUTURE.

END SUMMARY.

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2. IN HIS SPEECH, INAUGURATING THE VINTO TIN SMELTER EXPANSION, PRESIDENT BANZER NOTED THE GIGANTIC STRIDES WHICH HIS GOVERNMENT HAS MADE IN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SPHERES OVER THE PAST SIX YEARS. HE THEN LAUNCHED INTO AN ATTACK UPON QUOTE THE CHORUS OF VOICES UNQUOTE DEMANDING THE RETURN TO FORMAL DEMOCRACY. THIS SYSTEM OF POLITICS, HE COMMENTED,

POLITICIANS THEMSELVES DEBASED IN THE PAST, TURNING IT INTO A GRAND HYPOCRISY. HE ADVISED SUCH PEOPLE TO GIVE UP THEIR HOPES OF INDUCING A RETURN TO A FALSE DEMOCRACY WHICH WOULD SIGNIFY THE POSTPONEMENT OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE STAGNATION OF THE COUNTRY. BOLIVIA, HE SAID, IS LIVING A REVOLUTION AND THE TIME HAS COME FOR EVERYONE TO REALIZE THIS. SINCE EVERY GENUINE REVOLUTION SUBSTITUTES THE EXISTING POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM WITH A QUALITATIVELY DIFFERENT ONE, NATURALLY THE GOB IS IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING A NEW INSTITUTIONAL ORDER. IT WILL HAVE NO SIMILARITY WITH THE PREVIOUS GAME OF DECADENT NATIONAL POLITICKING WHICH ONLY BENEFITED PREVILEGED GROUPS, AND WHICH NOW HAS BEEN EXPUNGED FROM THE NATIONAL LIFE. HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO INDICATION OF WHAT FORM THE NEW INSTITUTIONAL ORDER WILL TAKE.

3. REACTION IN LA PAZ WAS SWIFT ALTHOUGH MEDIA COMMENT HAS BEEN MINIMAL AND SUBDUED. ONLY "HOY" THE SEMI-OFFICIAL DAILY SAW FIT TO EDITORIALIZE ON THE PRONOUNCEMENT, IN AN UNSURPRISINGLY SUPPORTIVE VEIN. NEVERTHELESS, INDIVIDUALS OF DIFFERING POLITICAL PERSUASIONS AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND ADVISORS HAVE EXHIBITED CONCERN AND IN SOME INSTANCES PREOCCUPATION IN DISCUSSING WITH EMBASSY OFFICIALS NOT ONLY THE PRESIDENT'S WORDS, BUT THE POSSIBLE REACTION TO THEM.

4. BANZER WAS MOST CERTAINLY REACTING TO RECENTLY INCREASED MNR AND FSB PRESSURES FOR REPAL OF THE 1974 DECREES PROHIBITING POLITICAL AND UNION ACTIVITIES, AND THEIR CALLS FOR ELECTIONS. FOR MONTHS NOW, THE FSB HAS BEEN INSISTING THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IT WILL HOLD A NATIONAL CONVENTION IN AUGUST 1977. LIKEWISE, THE MNR, ON THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1952 REVOLUTION, ON MAY DAY AND AGAIN IN AN OPEN LETTER (PUBLISHED IN THE COCHABAMBA DAILY, LOS TIEMPOS, ON JUNE 4,) INSISTED ON AN END TO THE POLITICAL RECESS TO BE FOLLOWED BY NATIONAL ELECTIONS. MEANWHILE, BANZER AND HIS ADVISORS WERE STUDYING WAYS TO CONSTITUTIONALIZE BOLIVIA, BUT APPARENTLY WITHOUT YET DEVELOPING ANY CONCRETE PLANS. AT A MINIMUM THE PRESIDENT PROBABLY WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT THE OLD PARTIES DID NOT GET OUT IN FRONT OF HOM ON THE CONSTITUTIONALIZATION ISSUE. HIS SPEECH, THEREFORE, AIMED AT CHECKING THE POLITICAL MOMENTUM OF UNOFFICIAL ACTIVITY -- AN ACTION UNDERSCORED BY THE INTERIOR MINISTER'S STATEMENT THAT THE NOVEMBER 1974 DECREES WILL REMAIN IN EFFECT.

5. THE QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER BANZER REALLY IS CLOSING THE DOOR TO ANY RETURN TO A TRADITIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK OR WHETHER THE VINTO SPEECH IS MERELY A TACTIC. FEW POLITICAL PRACTITIONERS EXPECTED A PRESIDENTIAL PRONOUNCEMENT BEFORE

THE INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY ON AUGUST 6, OR THE AUGUST 21, ANNIVERSARY OF BANZER'S RISE TO POWER. THERE HAVE BEEN NO PUBLIC INDICATIONS THAT THE MILITARY WERE INSISTING THAT THE PRESIDENT FORESTALL A RETURN TO POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITY. TO THIS EXTENT THE TIMING OF THE SPEECH WAS SOMEWHAT SURPRISING. BANZER MAY ONLY BE TRYING TO COOL POLITICAL FEVERS TO ENSURE HIS CONTINUED CONTROL OF DIRECTION AND RATE OF THE CONSTITUTIONALIZATION PROCESS. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY THAT HE HAS DECIDED TO OPT FOR A DIFFERENT SYSTEM OF POPULAR REPRESENTATION WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE IMPOSED OVER THE OBJECTIONS OF TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTICIPANTS.

6. EMBASSY IS POUCHING A COPY OF THE BANZER SPEECH AND OTHER PERTINENT DOCUMENTS TO THE DEPARTMENT.
STEDMAN

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